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ABSTRACT

In describing the "communiversity" program for adults and nontraditional students in the Fargo-Moorhead (Minnesota) area, this paper notes how the program developed from education programs of local churches to an expanded offering of adult continuing education in the liberal arts and sciences, personal and family life development, and business, civil, and social concerns. The main section of the paper reports on evaluative data illustrating the popularity and scope of this communiversity program. Also discussed are the sources of funding for the courses, responses from participants in the 1980 communiversity program, characteristics of the program's faculty and students, and topics in speech communication that are planned for future communiversity programs. The final section of the paper describes methods used for developing and advertising the communiversity concept to the public. (RL)

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STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT OFF CAMPUS: THE COMMUNIVERSITY

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Margaret Mead once said that "Our present notion of education breaks subject matter across life span. We should devise new institutional forms that design a continuing flow of learning and teaching consistent with maturity levels and interests..." Such a program is the Fargo-Moorhead Communiversity.

The F/M Communiversity in its present form began in 1970. Its initial thrust had been in the area of theological issues with seminars that attacked contemporary and historical issues of interest to church members who could not pursue them individually. In 1970 these offerings were expanded to include and even broader cross-section of the community. Courses were added which addressed the liberal arts and science, personal and family life development, and issues in business and society.

The month of February is without much color in most parts of the country but is even more so in Minnesota and the Dakotas. As a response to a felt need for both individual development throughout life and the paucity of activity in Winter, the Communiversity chose to run its sessions on the four Sundays in February. One thing which makes the program accessible to a wide range of people is the timing of the program. Sunday evening finds most people free of other activities and many potential teachers with an uncluttered schedule. A program of this type needs to be well timed to assure that the potential audience is willing to participate and capable of including it in its schedule.

The faculty includes instructors from all three of the area colleges (North Dakota State University in Fargo, Moorhead State University and Concordia College in Moorhead, MN) as well as members of the community with a particular interest or talent to share. Proposals for courses are developed by a

planning committee which includes people from all areas of the community. The proposals are developed into courses through collaboration with persons who volunteer or are asked to teach.

The thrust of the program in its early years had been primarily theological, either directly or as it was related to social issues. The Seminars provided an extension of the education programs of local area churches. For example, there may not have been many people interested in studying particular theologians in any one church, but by putting them all together in the extended community they could do things together that they might not otherwise be able to do.

In 1970, the course offerings were expanded to appeal to an even broader section of the community. In addition to theology, sessions were offered in the liberal arts and sciences, personal and family life development, and civil and social concerns. Dr. Martin Marty, of the University of Chicago, one of the country's leading church historians, described the F-M Communiversity as "the best community education in the Midwest-possibly in the nation."

EVALUATION - THE 1980 F/M COMMUNIVERSITY

The following responses came from 488 responses received on the final day in Sunday courses in which 740 persons were enrolled. This is a response of 66%, with 33.5% male and 66.5% female. Other Communiversity events were evaluated in other ways.

Participants in the Communiversity represent a wide cross-section of the Fargo-Moorhead area population. This diversity is reflected in the age, occupation, and educational background of the participants.

Age of Participants

Year	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 and Over
1975	4.9%	19.2%	17.5%	21.5%	25.4%	9.7%
1976	3.9	17.0	18.5	23.2	27.9	8.3
1977	1.7	12.6	18.9	24.0	29.8	12.2
1978	1.4	15.5	20.3	22.3	28.5	9.7
1979	2.1	9.4	19.8	21.7	33.6	13.0
1980	3.7	11.7	18.4	20.1	31.4	13.3

Occupation of Participants

Occupation	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Homemaker	25.1%	28.9%	33.4%	21.4%	21.5%	18.6%
Teacher	20.8	19.5	18.5	22.2	20.1	18.4
Student	14.8	11.2	4.6	6.2	4.8	6.8
Clergy	4.3	5.0	5.0	4.1	3.2	3.1
Secretary	4.0	5.8	4.4	4.7	3.4	4.7
Nurse	3.6	2.9	2.3	-	-	-
Health Profession	-	-	-	9.9	6.2	8.4
Farmer	1.7	2.4	2.9	3.2	2.7	2.7
Business	-	-	-	9.6	7.3	8.0
Retired	-	-	-	-	-	7.8
Other	25.5	23.2	28.4	17.6	16.4	14.1

Educational Background of Participants

Education	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
High School/Less	10.9%	15.6%	14.7%	12.4%	12.5%	14.1%
Some College	30.7	27.3	23.5	25.9	20.3	12.9
College Degree	21.9	21.9	23.1	20.3	19.6	26.8
Some Graduate Work	14.2	15.9	16.6	15.9	17.8)	33.0
Graduate Degree	21.5	18.8	22.1	23.8	21.2)	
Nurses' Training	-	-	-	-	-	4.1
Tech/Vocational	-	-	-	-	-	3.3

Home Location of Participants

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Fargo	37.5%	39.1%	43.7%	43.1%	46.1%	48.2%
Moorhead	43.4	36.0	35.9	36.4	35.8	37.1
Other	19.1	(Rural) 11.0	8.4	10.2	7.8	8.4
		(Other) 12.2	12.0	8.5	8.7	4.7

Initially, funding for the seminars came from registration fees but in 1969, area churches began subsidizing the program and have done so ever since. The support for the program has been ecumenical in the twenty-six congregations

(Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish) contributed to the support of Communiversity. In addition, there have been gifts from various foundations, private business and individuals. Monetary awards have been provided for the program from the North Dakota Commission for the Humanities and the Minnesota Humanities Commission which are both affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities. In an evaluation from the Minnesota Humanities Commission in 1979 it was noted that, "The range of topics, the variety of leaders, the entire controlling spirit of Communiversity - all contribute to an exemplary expression and exploring of the humanities."

The Communiversity classes in 1980, numbered 39. They continued to fall in the areas of liberal arts and sciences, but additionally have greatly explored the concept of meeting the needs of individuals in their daily living. The appeal of these programs is evident in the fact that many kinds of individuals chose to participate in these programs. In the chart on page 3, the reader might note that responses from the community have come from varying kinds of individuals. The age of the participants in the most recent calendar years indicate that people in the active life group, between 30 and 64 years of age, composed almost 70% of the participants. One could thus conclude that the Communiversity certainly is serving the needs of those who are actively involved in the community. Though the greatest participation of individuals has come from homemakers and teachers, one will note that there have been many other occupations which are represented including 8% of individuals who were retired.

One of the most interesting items in the evaluation of the 1980 Communiversity relates to the educational background of the participants. Fully twenty-seven percent of all those who participated had less than a college degree. Thus, these individuals are participating in college oriented programs for, in many cases, the first time in their lives. Though no data is available to indicate whether these individuals enroll in regular college programs as a result of

their contact with Communiversity, there is a great deal of evidence in registration that individuals have participated in the Communiversity for many years. One farmer from Devils Lake, North Dakota who spends his winters in Moorhead, attended five different classes in workshops in 1980 alone. Thus, the constituency of the Communiversity is not only broad, but regular.

The goal of Communiversity has been to broaden the lifestyle experiences of individuals in the community by cross-breeding the academic world, the business world and the world of every day life. This kind of blend is best recognized by an examination of the kinds of topics that have been taught in Communiversity courses. Recent course offerings have included titles such as: The Art of Human Relationships, Parenting, Loneliness, Stress Management, The Older Person in the Family, the Role of the Contemporary Woman, Communicating with People, Television: The Great Dilemma, Developing Your Relationships with the News Media...or, How to Improve the Prospect of Getting Your Press Releases Used, and Women in The Arts.

Of most interest to the Speech Communication field are topics which have been considered for future Communiversity programs. A brief listing of such topics would include the following: Conflict, Interpersonal Communication, Communication with Others in the Business World, Communicating with your Children, Understanding Non-Verbal Messages, Communicating with Those in Other Cultures, The History of Rhetoric and Public Address, Understanding Political Speech Making, Developing your Listening Skills, Marital Communication Strategies, Medical Communication, Understanding the Media, and Assertive Communication.

Programs of this nature would undoubtedly attract the same kinds of individuals who have participated in the programs which Communiversity has offered in the

past. Many of the participants in Communications seminars and related fields have indicated that this area is one in which significant additional work should be done. In fact, of all the programs offered last year, the seminar on Communicating with Others was the seminar which received the third highest ranking by individuals who indicated interest in pursuing additional work.

It should be clear to those who study contemporary societal change, that the United States is leaving the "Me" decade and entering the "We" decade. In concert with this transition of concern is the felt need of individuals to participate in the development of skills which will allow them to relate more effectively with those around them. What better way to relate the academic discipline of speech communication to the public then to offer courses which enhance their ability to live their daily lives. The Communiversity Director has indicated to this author the programs in this field are among the most likely to compose a significant portion of future curriculum. It would seem quite feasible that this phenomenon is not limited to the area in which Communiversity operates but would certainly be applicable in other communities as well.

Perhaps the most interesting result of the Communiversity is the evaluation of courses by those who participated in them. In the table which follows, ratings of courses have been included for the past five years. It is clear that individuals who have participated in Communiversity courses have been highly satisfied with the quality of the material that they have come in contact with.

General Rating of Communiversity Courses

Rating	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Excellent	69.3%	67.7%	69.3%	63.7%	67.4%	54.5%
Good	24.4	24.0	25.4	26.4	26.7	34.4
Average	3.4	4.1	2.5	3.8	2.7	7.2
Fair	0.7	2.3	0.4	1.5	0.4	3.1
Poor	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.3	0.0	0.2

Reaction to the Course

Changed my view of this subject	14.5%
Modified my view of this subject	28.5
Reinforced my view of the subject	48.2
Did not affect my view of this subject	5.1

View of Participation of the Class (Statement Which Most Agrees)

Participation helped people understand the topic	37.7%
The instructors and/or panelists were easy to talk to	22.1
Audience discussion was not helpful	2.5
The instructor encouraged audience discussion	22.1
People were afraid to speak up	0.8
Topic was not suited to discussion; lecture method was best	14.8

Intention to Attend 1981 Communiversity

Responses	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Yes	84.4%	81.0%	96.4%	92.4%	94.8%	93.4%
No	3.4	2.8	0.0	0.6	0.4	0.2
Undecided	11.0	14.8	2.5	4.2	2.8	5.9

Noting that individuals almost universally have ranked the programs either excellent or good on the five-point scale indicates that there has been a very high degree of satisfaction with both the administration of the program and the individual topics offered

It is also interesting to note that a significant number of individuals thought that they had either changed or modified their views on the subjects that they have studied. Although the largest percentage of individuals felt that their views had been reinforced by programs which they attended, it is important to note that many of the programs attracted people who were looking for implementation of concepts they already had great sympathy with. For example, in the program communicating with people, most individuals indicated that they already were aware of changes that they needed to make but were looking for methods to implement those changes. The fact that many people, 32 to 43 percent, changed their views because of the programs presented, is a high commendation of the effort and dedication of the instructors to present a variety of viewpoints with adequate justification.

Judging by the response of participants to questions regarding the amount and kind of participation they had in the program, it is clear that most individuals felt encourage and helped by instructors to air their opinions and to discuss openly. In fact, less than 1% of all individuals thought that people were afraid to speak in classes, and less then 3% thought that audience discussion was not very helpful. The overwhelming response of individuals to the kinds of interaction that took place with the instructors indicates that the kind of approach communications scholars might take should be suited to this kind of audience. Though sometimes it is a concern that individuals who are not regular college students may not feel free to engage in forthright discussions, the ratings in the Communiversity program indicate that they feel quite comfortable doing so in this setting.

Of most interest to those who are considering programs of this type is the intention of individuals to participate regularly in the program. In 1976, the lowest number of individuals intended to participate in the following year and that number was a remarkable 81%. Though this might indicate that the Communiversity serves a relatively small number of individuals over a long period of time, one must be heartened by the conclusion that if some kind of initial base of participation is established, it is likely that those individuals will encourage others to attend. It is important to note here that Communiversity has grown in size in each year that it has existed. Thus, not only is there a strong base of continual participants, but those participants actually seemed to do a good job of encouraging other to attend as well.

Though statistical information is very helpful in assessing programs of this kind, it seems as important to examine the ancedotal information provided by participants. The following comments were made by individuals who participated

in a course involving marital communication. Their comments testify to the nature of involvement and the deep conviction that individuals appear to develop for the kind of education that they receive in this setting.

Evaluation - Course 32: AN "R & R" WEEKEND FOR COUPLES

(Evaluation forms were not made available to members of this course, which met the second weekend in February, Saturday noon through Sunday noon. Instead, class members were asked to write paragraphs listing their comments and evaluations. Samples of the comments are listed below.)

- Thank you for a wonderful 24 hours. We wish we could have done this 35 years ago and will try to pass some of it on to our married children. We will think of lessons learned here often.

- One word - outstanding. Would like to give this experience to each of my married children as an anniversary gift. Thanks.

- The weekend came at a time that I was hurting. I felt supported and able to relax at the same time I confronted problem areas in our marriage and that is an indication of your skill in leading a group, I believe. I gained specific techniques to use and feel more whole and positive.

- These thoughts and this information should have been a prerequisite for embarking on marriage & life in dealing with all other people.

- I wish we had had this kind of workshop many years ago in our early years of marriage so we could have developed a better plan for our relationship and developed different habits of communication. Although our marriage is basically good, I do wish we had provided a better model for our children for their young married lives. I'm looking forward to a spirit of renewal in our own marriage. Thanks a lot. We hope to make it back again.

- We enjoyed the couples R - R Weekend and the workshop. Although we have attended before, we feel there were benefits from having a "check up" and tuning in to each other once again. Thank you for this opportunity!

- This weekend was a good experience for us. We had time to enjoy each other, figure out some problems that we haven't had time to do before. We got a chance to forget about our other responsibilities. It was good and opening to each of us. Thank you for sharing your time with us.

- It gave us the opportunity to be together and to reflect upon ourselves and our marriage. Some of the exercises really facilitated openness and in communicating our thoughts.

- This was an enriching soul-searching weekend. We enjoyed the sessions and the time we had together.

Since the program seems to have enjoyed a great degree of success, the natural concern of those interested in non-traditional education is, how did it get started and how might I develop a program of this type. In order to satisfy that curosity, the next section of this paper will concern itself with the methods used for developing and advertising the Communiversity concept to the public.

Though the Communiversity is now an established institution in the Fargo-Moorhead community an attempt is made each year to reach new segments of the population and to put before them new listings of the courses. Some 45,000 flyers were distributed through churches, schools, colleges, service clubs and organizations and sent by mail to former participants and other interested persons in the surrounding community.

In addition, nine banks in the community inserted a small flyer in their statement mailings in December of January preceding the Communiversity offerings. An advertisement was placed in a local newspaper and a locally printed magazine. Interviews featuring the Communiversity and its offerings were conducted on several local television programs and news releases were distributed by the colleges to newspapers in the area. On a well-traveled street which goes by the colleges, two fast-food outlets displayed advertising and a large sign was placed adjacent to the highway.

One feature of the Communiversity has always been an initial convocation which featured a speaker of national renown. The object of this convocation has been to draw individuals to the Communiversity program to hear the main speaker and then become acquainted with the course work. Individuals who come to see this speaker are given the information and are informed as to how they can enroll that very evening.

The speaker for 1979 was Maggie Kuhn, the well known advocate of Rights of the Aged. Miss Kuhn was generous with her time and gave lengthy individual interviews to television stations and public radio and newspapers. In her lecture and interviews she commented upon the concept of drawing people together of various ages in a learning situation and challenging them with new ideas. She emphasized that the young and old should be working together and that each has much to offer the other. Of course, she had an impact on the community and with it generated even more publicity for the Communiversity program. Clearly an event of this sort attracts wide attention in the community and focuses concern on the issues that a Communiversity addresses.

Another concern might well be, who will teach these courses? As well as using current college faculty members, Communiversity has made extensive use of faculty emeriti and retired individuals in the community. Both groups have indicated that although the financial reward for teaching in Communiversity is not great, there are other intangible benefits. The comments from those who have taught Communiversity courses best illustrate these intangibles. Here are some of their comments:

- I love the subject, I loved the people enrolled and their open, inquiring attitude. I enjoyed the interaction with the class through discussions that spilled over into the breaks, after classtime, even dinner! There was precious little about the experience that I did not enjoy.
- I enjoyed working with people who varied so greatly in age, interest and vocational discipline.
- I appreciated the opportunity to put some of my currently unemployed skills to use, the opportunity to be challenged. Also, the course was a tremendous growing and learning time for me, personally.
- I have enjoyed interacting with different people in the community than I ordinarily have a chance to do.
- Appreciated the opportunity to be a part of Communiversity and to interact with fellow community members.
- Adults are a great change; I enjoyed their serious approach and maturity.

Although establishing a program of this type is not easy, its rewards justify the effort. In reflecting on the significance of the Communiversity, Selma Anderson, the coordinator of Communiversity programs made this comment, "At a time when local and national issues are often polarizing segments of the community, the bringing together of people from various backgrounds in discussions centering on basic values can help to build a more human way of life for all of us. Communiversity provides a forum for those who have something of value to offer and it meets many kinds of needs. It is rewarding to look at the overall impact it has had on the community and to hear the comments of the many people who have been refreshed and stimulated by the courses they have taken." Indeed, at a time when universities and colleges must be acutely aware of their impace on constituent communities, a program of this type should have no difficulty finding support in university administrations. There can be few better ways of building a connection between academia and the community then offering the kinds of services that Communiversities can bring.

When Arthur P. Crabtree said, "The idea that the education of the American adult is as vital to our welfare as is the education of the American child has simply not been accepted by our society," he obviously had never attended a communiversity program.

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